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La Porte Police hail new FBI App to aid search, recovery of missing kids



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La Porte Police Department is hailing a new iPhone app that will help law enforcement agencies across the country in their efforts to recover missing children. The FBI's Child ID App allows parents to store photographs and identifying information about their children that could be useful to law enforcement if their child was abducted or missing.

"When a child is lost or missing, a parent doesn't have the ability to think in times of panic and anxiety," La Porte police spokesman Sgt. John Krueger said. "(The app) has all the information on hand to help police investigators." Krueger said the first few hours are crucial in cases of missing children, and the quicker the police have an accurate description and photo of the child, the better the chances for a safe recovery.

How it works - Developed by the FBI, the new app, which can be downloaded free from the App Store on iTunes, currently is only available for use on iPhones, but there are plans to expand the tool to other mobile devices in the near future. With the new app, parents can simply open the application file and retrieve information, such as height, weight, hair and eye color, as well as photographs of their child. The information is stored in a secure and convenient location and can only be accessed at the parent's discretion. The app also has a quick link to email, so parents can quickly ship information to investigators.

"It's something our support services division are promoting right now so the community is aware of the device," Krueger said. "Once the application is better understood and the community becomes aware of it, I think it could be very useful." Though cases of missing children are rare in La Porte, Krueger said they have had to intervene in child custody disputes and information gleaned from the device could be helpful in those cases.

Krueger said they want to get the word out to parents about the new device, which because of its immediacy could be more effective than the child ID kits, currently available for free to public school children across the state. Bob Walcutt, executive director of the Laura Recovery Center in Friendswood, said he doesn't know much about the new technology, but thinks it is a good idea. "It gives parents another tool," Walcutt said. "The more people who are being proactive to keep children safe, that's really a good thing."